

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

PA-491

FILE COPY

Sta

1
Ag 84
Pro



Azaleas and Rhododendrons

at the National Arboretum



JAN 1984

LIBRARY

Program Aid 491
National Arboretum
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

1
Ag 84
Pre

PA-491

FILE COPY Sta



Azaleas and Rhododendrons

at the National Arboretum



Program Aid 491
National Arboretum
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



AZALEAS AND RHODODENDRONS AT THE NATIONAL ARBORETUM

One of the most colorful spring-flowering groups at the National Arboretum, Washington, D.C., is the collection of azaleas and rhododendrons.

A collection of species and horticultural varieties hardy in this climate is being assembled at the Arboretum in furtherance of its scientific and educational objectives. Standard reference collections are maintained for comparative study and evaluation. Species and selected breeding strains are available for research purposes. One aim of the research is to produce improved races for cultivation in climates where azaleas and rhododendrons now are not well adapted.

BOTANICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Azaleas and rhododendrons are members of the heath family (Ericaceae) and are closely

related to the blueberries, cranberries, trailing-arbutus, and mountain laurel.

The original, or Linnean, classification (in 1753) of these plants was based largely upon American species. It seemed logical at that time to place the deciduous (leaf-shedding) kinds in one genus, *Azalea*, and the evergreen kinds in another genus, *Rhododendron*. But, with the subsequent influx of species from the Orient (about 700 species have since been described), it was found that no simple and constant characters remained as a basis for separation; some of the "azaleas" were evergreen and some of the "rhododendrons" were deciduous. Consequently, during the present century, most botanical authors have assigned all species of azaleas to the genus *Rhododendron*.

Even though azaleas are botanically rhododendrons, most gardeners and nurserymen will continue to refer to the name "azalea" for the thin-leaved, semievergreen or deciduous types, and to "rhododendron" for the large leathery-leaved and fully evergreen kinds.

KINDS OF AZALEAS

Azaleas of the garden may be roughly classified into five principal groups:

- The relatively compact growing, semievergreen kinds principally derived from the Japanese *Rhododendron obtusum*, with white, pink, or red flowers. This group includes the Kurume, Glenn Dale, and Kaempferi hybrids.
- The later and larger flowered orange-red deciduous azaleas derived from *Rhododendron molle* of China, *R. japonicum* of Japan, *R. luteum* from the Caucasus, and some American species; these are the Ghent and Mollis hybrids.
- The group of about 16 native azalea species with infinite minor variations. They are hardy deciduous plants having white, pink, yellow, or orange-red flowers. These are the wild azaleas—"bush honeysuckles" and "flame azaleas"—that grow from New England to Florida and Texas.
- The large-flowered "Indian" azaleas, which provide a major color display in the gardens of Charleston, S.C., and the gulf coast. These are not reliably hardy at the National Arboretum.
- Additional species from China and Japan of interest primarily to the collector or botanist, but including *R. schlippenbachii*, *R. yedoense*, and a few others that are frequently cultivated in gardens.

THE ARBORETUM COLLECTION

Azaleas.—Two main plantings of azaleas are especially conspicuous during the flowering season in April and May—the Glenn Dale hybrids of group 1, above, and the Ghent and Mollis hybrids of group 2.

The Glenn Dale hybrids cover the slopes of Mount Hamilton generally above the roadway. They are also exhibited as a named collection in the brick-walled Morrison Garden at the approach to the general display.

The Ghent and Mollis hybrids are found below the roadway in many scattered plantings. These hybrids are also assembled as a named collection in a central part of Azalea Valley.

Many other kinds of azaleas, including the

Kurume and Kaempferi hybrids and the native azalea species, are represented in the Arboretum collection of more than 1,200 varieties. The Glenn Dale and the Ghent and Mollis hybrids, however, will remain the most conspicuous plantings for some years.

Rhododendrons.—Included in the Arboretum collection of "true" rhododendrons are some 300 species and garden hybrids. These can be seen as grouped plantings on the north side of Mount Hamilton and as scattered individual plants in the lower part of Azalea Valley. Most of the plants are English varieties, which have large leaves and many-colored flowers. However, American Dexter varieties and the better-known species also are well represented.

LOCATION OF MAJOR GROUPS

The more important Arboretum plantings of azaleas and rhododendrons may be located by directional signs on the principal foot trails.

Glenn Dale Hybrids

These large-flowered "Japanese" hybrid azaleas were bred at the Glenn Dale Station of the United States Department of Agriculture by B. Y. Morrison. They are well adapted for planting in this area and 65,000 representatives provide the main display above the long curve of Azalea Road. Young plants of 457 selections, which were named by Morrison and released by the Department, are assembled for comparative study in the Morrison Garden.

Kurume and Kaempferi Hybrids

A number of Kurume and Kaempferi hybrid azaleas and closely related Gable hybrids are planted along the upper levels of Mount Hamilton walk, which starts at the Morrison Garden. Along a grass walk north of the Morrison Garden is a much larger collection of several hundred varieties of the standard Kurume, Glenn Dale, Gable, Chisholm-Merritt, Pericat, Yerkes, Morrison, and Shammarello hybrids. Within the south entrance to Morrison Garden are several of the large-flowered and late-blooming Satsuki (Chugai) hybrids. These hybrids are combinations of *R. indicum* with *R. obtusum* of the Kurumes.

Ghent Hybrids

Many of these are immediately across the road from Morrison Garden. A named collection of Ghent hybrids—3 plants each of about 60 varieties—is located in the lower center of Azalea Valley.

Mollis Hybrids

Mass plantings are assembled on both sides of the main ravine below the brick overlook. A named collection of 100 varieties is grouped with the named Ghents in the lower center of Azalea Valley.

This excellent collection of Ghent and Mollis hybrids was donated by the people of the Netherlands.

Knaphill Hybrids

These large-flowered deciduous azaleas were introduced from England. Some of them—the Exbury hybrids—were bred at the Exbury estate of the late Lionel de Rothschild. The collection of 120 varieties, which bloom in May after the Mollis azaleas, is assembled in the lower center of Azalea Valley near the Mollis azaleas. The Knaphill hybrids seem to be very hardy and exhibit a wide color range that includes white, yellow, pink, orange, and red.

Native Azalea Species

About 16 American species, with their variants and hybrids, are grouped in the small valley running down to the south arm of Horseshoe Pond. This collection is a product of research work with the native species—work that began in 1951.

Exotic Species

A number of exotic species, chiefly from China and Japan and including *R. luteum*, *mariesi*, *ovatum*, *reticulatum*, and *schlippenbachii*, are located across the road from Morrison Garden—just below the first grouping of Ghent hybrids.

Rhododendrons

The main collection of named hybrid rhododendrons is to be found along the Gotelli Walk, which extends around the lower north side of Mount Hamilton from the Evergreen Azalea Trail to the Mount Hamilton approach road. The Dexter hybrids flank a loop trail in the same area. In addition to the hybrids planted along this trail, a species planting has been started here. Young plants of 36 varieties of the Shammarello *R. fortunei-smirnowi-catawbiense* hybrids are grouped at the east end of Gotelli Walk.

A number of the very hardy Catawba hybrids are planted on the upper slopes of Azalea Valley. Young plants of additional English hybrids are planted below the small pond near the lower footbridges. Sizable specimens of *R. fortunei* decorate the approach to the Dogwood Planting in the northeast part of the Arboretum.

CULTURAL SUGGESTIONS

With careful hardiness selection both azaleas and rhododendrons are well adapted to cultivation in the gardens of large areas of our country provided that their few demands are satisfied. They need an acid soil which is fairly well drained; they like abundant peat moss, leaf mold, or other suitable organic matter incorporated in this soil; and they are greatly benefited by a year-round mulch or soil top-dressing of leaves, peat moss, or sawdust.

An ideal position, especially for rhododendrons, is the partial shade of structures or high-branched trees, although many of the hardier azaleas succeed in full sunlight.

Given an occasional spring feeding with sulfate of ammonia, cottonseed meal, or a prepared acid-soil fertilizer for established specimens and water as it is needed during very dry weather, both azaleas and rhododendrons will provide a maximum color display in return for a minimum of further attention.

Listings of recommended varieties of azaleas and rhododendrons are available upon request.



This publication supersedes National Arboretum
Leaflet No. 1 of the same title.

Washington, D.C.

Issued April 1962